

Post-Communist Transformation Revisited

Illner, Michal

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Illner, M. (1996). Post-Communist Transformation Revisited. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 4(2), 157-169. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-54105>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Post-Communist Transformation Revisited

MICHAL ILLNER*

Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague

Abstract: During the seven years that have elapsed since 1989, empirical evidence and theoretical reflections have been accumulated which make it possible to elaborate, supplement and extend some of the initial observations made in the early stages of the processes of post-Communist transformation in East and Central Europe. The author argues that (1) the transformations are more complicated, conflictual and prolonged than originally expected; (2) they are not the “rectifying revolutions” or “transitions” suggested by some authors, since they are creating a new social reality which is not a mere transfer of the known societal models; (3) there is more continuity in the post-1989 development than was originally admitted and this development has been greatly influenced by both the Communist and pre-Communist legacies; (4) to understand the post-Communist transformations, it is necessary to understand the Communist system itself, its social roots and genesis; in doing so, it is appropriate to view the Communist society not only as oppressive and economically untenable, but also as a functioning and, to a certain degree, legitimate system; (5) the post-Communist transformation in East and Central European countries has been increasingly determined by the strategic, long-term factors and less so by the more immediate circumstances of the regime change and the post-1989 situation; (6) in terms of the long-term strategic factors, the situation of the individual post-Communist countries is different and so are their probable future developments; it is, therefore, increasingly inappropriate to make broad generalisations about the post-Communist development in the whole East and Central European region, while it is appropriate to distinguish between the individual countries and their clusters.

Czech Sociological Review, 1996, Vol. 4 (No. 2: 157-169)

Introduction

Societal transformation in the former socialist countries of East and Central Europe has entered its seventh year. It has also been seven years since the processes of the transformation in this region became a major focus of interest in the social sciences. The first generation of comments and analyses brought many relevant ideas, interpretations and hypotheses, mostly of a general character, on the causes, nature, problems and potential future course of transformation. They were inspired by perceptive observation, theoretical reflections and sometimes by analogy with the earlier democratic transitions in Latin America and Southern European countries [e.g. Andorka 1992, Ash 1990, Dahrendorf 1990, Habermas 1990, Offe 1991, Przeworski 1991, Sztompka 1992, Staniszkis 1991, Stark 1992, Wolchik 1991 and Czech authors Možný 1991, Machonin 1992, Musil 1992].

In the years that followed, the different aspects of transformation quickly became the subject of empirical research and a rich body of data and data-based knowledge has been accumulated, which shed light on the individual components of transformation and

*) Direct all correspondence to: JUDr. Michal Illner, Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Jilská 1, 110 00 Praha 1, phone + 42 2 24 22 02 56, fax + 42 2 24 22 02 78, e-mail illner@mbox.cesnet.cz

their interlinkages, on the temporal aspects of transformation as well as on the specific features it has acquired in the different countries of the region. Many were comparative multinational projects which linked the findings from Eastern and Central Europe to the existing Western knowledge of social and political change. In this way, the Eastern and Central European “*transitological*” studies, as some have called the study of societal transitions or transformations [van Zon 1994], have become better informed. Attempts were made to verify, to further elaborate the initial observations and to propose new hypotheses. In addition, the societal development in Eastern and Central Europe itself has brought some new twists, not foreseen by the first generation of transitological studies, which called for explanation.¹

In this paper, I wish to sketch several general tentative propositions concerning the more advanced stage of the post-1989 societal development in East and Central Europe. The propositions were inspired by the recent development in the region as well as by some more recent studies, both theoretical and empirical [e.g. Bauman 1994, Gorzelak et al. 1994, Juchler 1994, Machonin 1994, Matějů 1995, Rychard 1993, Šrubař 1994, Sztompka 1993 and 1996, van Zon 1994, Zapf 1994 and others]. In particular, the ideas expressed by van Zon in his study of the transformations in East and Central Europe and the results of the comparative research project East Central Europe 2000 [c.f. Gorzelak op cit. and Illner 1993] were helpful in this context. My propositions are of a rather hypothetical character and are intended to stimulate further discussion.

The transformations are more complicated, more conflictual and lengthier than originally expected

Although the post-Communist transformation was viewed from the beginning as a formidable task – c.f. R. Dahrendorf’s [1990] “valley of tears”, the real-life difficulties of this process were underestimated by the first analysts, the general public and politicians. Let us discuss some of the problems.

Transformation is a multi-dimensional process and its political, economic, social and cultural components are so tightly intertwined that they have to be considered jointly, both in practical policy and research. While on the purely analytical level, the three components and their change can be taken (temporarily at least) as separate, in the reality they are interdependent and they occur simultaneously. There are no such things as purely “economic”, “constitutional”, “political” or “social and cultural” transformations, the real process is always multidimensional – sociocultural, economic and political at the same time [c.f. Sztompka 1992, Musil 1992].

Moreover, while it is possible to model transformation as a series of consecutive stages – first the political and constitutional changes, thereafter economic changes and finally sociocultural changes – c.f. R. Dahrendorf’s [1990] “hour of the lawyer”, “hour of the economist” and “hour of the citizen”, in reality the three processes occur in parallel, or tend to be ordered differently, and are parts of one stream of change. The simultaneity is a major source of difficulties – of a “mutual blockage of solutions to the problems” [Offe 1991: 873], as the progress in any of the above respects depends on the success of the remaining ones. This *circulus vitiosus* can only be broken by stepwise changes on all

¹) Among the surprises which call for explanation are the recent left turns in several countries of the region. One of the possible interpretations was proposed by P. Matějů [Matějů 1995].

the above fronts. The idea that in policy making the three components of change can be temporally separated and “done way” one by one is illusory.

Typically, three kinds of fallacies become a threat when the multidimensionality of transformation and simultaneity of its components are neglected. The “*institutional fallacy*” consists in overestimating the importance of changes of formal institutions within the overall context of the transformation. Some legislators believe, for example, that, once proper institutions have been built, social behaviour will automatically follow along the established formal channels. Obviously, that is an illusion. While institution-building is an inevitable component of post-Communist transformation – new political and economic institutions (political parties, parliaments, local governments, administrative bodies, private firms, financial institutions etc.) had to be established during the early stages of transformation, they do not by themselves guarantee the proper functioning of the new system. For institutions to function properly, social and cultural prerequisites, such as supportive social interests and a corresponding democratic political culture, administrative culture and a culture of economic relations (the entrepreneurial culture) must as well be available. It is certainly true that institutions can to a certain degree stimulate, channel and mould social behaviour, but it is equally true that incompatible cultural patterns may make institutions ineffective or may even undermine them. The problem of *civilisational competence* [c.f. Sztompka 1993] or rather civilisational incompetence in the post-Communist societies has, therefore, assumed a foremost importance in the latter stages of the transformation. While the new institutions (though not all of them) are mostly in place, their proper functioning, determined in a great part by social and cultural factors, is endangered by the lagging social and cultural transformation (c.f. also below on the continuities in post-Communist development).

In turn, the “*economic fallacy*” consists in overestimating the economic component of the post-Communist changes, in assuming a deterministic causal chain between the new economic relations and other aspects of transformation. Changes of ownership structure, liberalisation of prices, re-creation of the market, structural changes of the economy – such processes are considered to be the sole and primary movers of transformation, with social and cultural changes following automatically in a more or less passive manner. Championed by many professional economists and by economists-turned-politicians, some of them theoreticians and designers of economic reforms in the former socialist countries, this approach neglects the fact that economic measures are filtered by culture and that there is a powerful feedback between these measures and the social system. Beside being a manifestation of “professional blindness”, this stance is sometimes doctrinally rooted in neoliberal economic theories.

Finally, the “*voluntaristic fallacy*” is the belief that the successes and failures of the post-Communist transformation predominantly depend on the configuration, behaviour and strategies of political actors (political parties and movements, the leading politicians – the Havel and Walesas; foreign political and economic institutions – NATO, the European Union, the World Bank, the IMF, foreign capital, the conspiracies of the former *nomenklatura*, Mafias, ethnic minorities, etc.). Situational and organizational factors, personal qualities, the behavior of key individuals and small groups and good luck, play an exaggerated role in this view, while the hard societal factors are disregarded. In East and Central European politics, this voluntaristic approach is usually embraced by populist political parties and is attractive for segments of the less educated public.

Transformation also takes more time and brings more hardships than was expected by the general public and often more, in fact, than the public is willing to tolerate. The length and the difficulties of transformation tend to exhaust the patience of the population, especially where living standards have dropped dramatically and for a protracted length of time, where high unemployment prevails and upward social mobility stagnates. Beside the deterioration of material living standard, they are other concomitants of the transformation – the volatile and anomic social situation and the rise of criminality, which create the feeling of instability and distress and which contribute to public dissatisfaction. The social legitimacy of the reforms is weakened and with it, political support for the reform parties. Left- or populist turns may then follow in national elections, as was the case in several countries of the region (Belorussia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia). Dissatisfaction with the development may also be the result of a contradiction between the population's *expectations* of the reform and its perceived outcome. This *relative* deprivation may have a political impact similar to that of the objective handicaps [c.f. Matějů 1995]. The first cohort of post-1989 politicians might have contributed to this frustration by promising sooner and easier results than they could have realistically expected.

New social systems are created during the post-Communist transformation

Several students of post-Communist societies have noted that the majority of ideas and institutions brought to life during the transformation are neither entirely new nor untested. They have been the cornerstones of Western democracy and of the market economy, and many of them were anchored in the pre-war life of the Eastern and Central European countries. Ash [1990] has observed that the ideas emphasised in the Eastern European countries after 1989 were the old, well-tested ideas of democracy and liberalism. The absence of novelty in the programs of post-Communist transformation, the emphasis on restoration rather than innovation, the fact that no influential new ideas about social organisation, no "*ex ante*" revolutionary theory [Offe 1991] was advanced, have led some observers of the Eastern and Central European scene to the conclusion that recent developments are simply bringing these societies back towards a normal situation, that they mark the end of a "*long and tragic historical deviation which had begun in 1917*" [Dahrendorf 1990]. In this sense, the changes in 1989 have been labelled as "*rectifying revolutions*" [Habermas 1990] and it was assumed that the post-1989 changes would be a *transition* to some well-known target situations.

While this observation is mostly correct as far as the stated goals and ideologies of transformation are concerned, it may prove wrong in terms of the policies used to implement such goals and the changes themselves (even the goals of transformation occasionally included non-traditional ideas – c.f. the idea of "*non-political politics*" promulgated by anti-Communist dissidents in Hungary or the idea of a "*post-democratic*" political system suggested by the present Czech president Václav Havel as a possible way of overcoming deficiencies of traditional democracies – [c.f. Havel 1990: 129-133]).

In fact, the "rectifying" forces interact with the legacies of the Communist system as well as with those of the more distant past of the Eastern and Central European countries to produce problems, solutions and a new reality that is sometimes different from both the Western and the pre-war situations in the countries involved. Forty or so years of totalitarian, redistributive and paternalistic systems have had a heavy impact on social structure, social networks, behavioural patterns and the cultures of Eastern and Central

European societies, and it would contradict sociological wisdom to suppose that this heritage has vanished without leaving any trace. There is an on-going interaction between the forces and models transferred from Western democracies, the heritage of the “*real-socialist*” society, the more distant past of Eastern and Central European countries and the innovative solutions called for by the unprecedented situation of the “exit from communism”. The “*lost-child-returning-home*” model of post-Communist transformation is simplistic and ahistorical; we hypothesise that irrespective of the programmatic intentions of the transformation’s designers – politicians and intellectuals, the societies that are developing in Eastern and Central Europe on the ruins of the Communist regime will not just become late-arrivals to the family of the Western liberal capitalist states and will not be passive copies of some of them. Nor will they be reproductions of what Eastern and Central European societies used to be before the Communist takeover or before World War II.²

The process of transformation is apparently producing its own social systems, unprecedented in many respects. It is still too early to predict the final shape which the new societies in Eastern and Central Europe may be taking as the result of the many, often contradictory influences currently being exerted. Their transformation has not yet come to its end, their development options are open and the outcome may prove difficult to subsume under any of the known societal types. The emerging societies may be as specific as is the process of transformation itself. Almost certainly they will not correspond to the blueprints of the reformers, whose declared goals – the (re)introduction of pluralist democracy, civil society, market economy and the rule of law – while certainly an important driving force, do not fully determine the actual course of the development. This development is more complex and contradictory than a mere implementation of the “democracy and marketisation” program package. The program has unexpected and unwanted consequences which can potentially derail it. We would, therefore, hesitate to endorse W. Zapf’s view that transformations are an underlying process of *modernisation* [Zapf 1991: 46]. This may be so, but also other than modern outcomes of this process are still imaginable.³

There are strong elements of continuity in the post-1989 development.

As a consequence of the fact that the post-Communist development is co-determined by factors anchored in the recent as well as the more distant past, there is much more continuity in this development than has often been admitted. Both public opinion, politicians and many social analysts at first primarily perceived and stressed the elements of rupture and disconnectedness in the transformation, the profound differences separating the post-Communist and the Communist situation, the “*sudden, radical break with the past*” [Sztompka 1992: 11]. This impression was supported by the speed of the disintegration of the Communist regimes and by the suddenness of the events which took most observers

²) Those who claim that the countries of Eastern and Central Europe should nowadays be inspired by what they were before the Second World War or before the Communist takeovers, would do well to remember that, with the exception of former Czechoslovakia, the countries in question had authoritarian or even semi-fascist regimes and retarded agrarian or semi-agrarian economies. Certainly nothing to be copied sixty years later.

³) C.f. the critical discussion on the modernisation-based model of transformation in Srubar [1994].

by surprise. The influence of the past was disregarded and for some time the feeling prevailed that the reforming societies would enjoy a wide freedom of choice when re-designing their political, economic and social systems.

It took some time before the grip of the past made itself felt. As all revolutions, that of 1989 was not quite as radical as it purported to be. The continuities are both structural and cultural and reach to the more recent as well as to the distant past. P. Sztompka wrote about the "*burden of liabilities*" encountered by the transforming societies in social consciousness, economic infrastructure, ecology, administrative system, demographic structure and other areas [Sztompka 1992]. D. Stark [Stark 1992] introduced the concept of "*path-dependency*" to express the fact that innovation is constrained by the *institutions* inherited from the past which limit the space of potential action and, in fact, induce some continuity. What was meant was mainly the limiting role of the institutions of the Communist regime for the post-Communist development. P. Sztompka [1993] and others before him [Dahrendorf 1990, Musil 1992] drew attention to the limiting role of the *cultural legacies* of Communism. For the new institutions to function properly, cultural prerequisites have to be fulfilled: the democratic political culture, the administrative culture and the entrepreneurial culture. All three degenerated during the years of "really existing socialism", so that a "*civilisational incompetence*" has developed, as Piotr Sztompka [1993] called the syndrome, which severely complicates the progress of transformation. The political changes of 1989 and the restructuring of institutions that followed were to a much lesser degree accompanied by the change in people's patterns of behaviour, values and attitudes that had been moulded during the relatively long period of "really existing socialism".

Beyond the Communist legacy, and on a deeper level, the processes of transformation seem to be also influenced by long-range factors stemming from the more distant, *pre-Communist past* of the respective societies. Many such legacies were temporarily "frozen" during the years of the Communist regime and have been re-activated since its collapse.⁴ The long-distance continuities have been frequently overlooked as the search for legacies focused mainly on the more recent handicaps inherited from the Communist society. It is, for instance, in the territorial structure of political behaviour that, in some countries of the region, the pre-war patterns have been reproduced.⁵ Other analyses suggested that family traditions mattered in post-1989 economic and political entrepreneur-

⁴) In fact, the pre-Communist legacies, were not entirely "frozen" during the Communist era. They co-determined the particular shades which the regime adopted in the individual countries of Eastern and Central Europe as well as the ways it was digested by the respective societies.

⁵) In analysing the regional structure of the Czech parliamentary elections in 1990 and 1992 and comparing it with the pre-war and early post-war elections, P. Jehlička, T. Kostecký and associates found that there is a prolonged tendency in some regions to support the Communist party, continuing from the pre-war time [Jehlička et al. 1993, Kostecký 1994]. Analogically, W. Surážska [1996] found that in Poland the territorial structure of political activism on the local level (measured by turn-out in the parliamentary elections) followed to a certain degree the former partitions of the country among the Austro-Hungarian, Prussian and Russian empires.

ship [c.f. Illner 1992]. Little is, unfortunately, known about the social and cultural mechanisms which are facilitating this transmission.⁶

The legacies of the past – of the socialist one, as well as of the earlier, pre-socialist era – co-determine the space available for transformation. The methodological lesson is that there should be more *historical thinking* in the analyses of the post-Communist transformation. The societal changes after 1989 can hardly be understood without the knowledge of the genesis and functioning of the “real-socialist” system and of the political, social and economic development preceding and causing the Communist takeovers.

The “really existing socialism” has also to be viewed as a functioning system with a certain degree of social legitimacy

When tracing the legacies of the “real-socialist” societies, one would be ill-advised to paint such societies simplistically as just the “empire of evil” into which they were dragged solely by external forces, entirely against their own will, and in which nearly everybody, with the exception of the “*nomenklatura*”, suffered. Such an over-politicised ideological approach tends to ignore the social roots of the socialist system and makes it impossible to understand its functioning as well as its legacies. The socialist option, although nowhere a majority choice, was embraced in these countries during and after World War II by significant parts of their population – there were, of course, considerable differences between the countries in this respect; for example, in Czech Lands Communist Party received a massive support in 1946 elections, while in Slovakia it did not succeed. The support was also a reaction to the economic and social deprivation accompanying the pre-war capitalism and, in particular, to the social stress of the economic crisis in the thirties, the political disappointment resulting from the appeasement policies of the Great Powers toward Nazi Germany (this was a powerful factor in the Czech Lands) and the war experience, which lead to the determination to arrange things differently, so as to prevent any such conflicts in the future. Also authority of the USSR whose armies liberated East Central and Eastern Europe, and idealised images of its social and political system played an important role during and after the war.

The “really existing” socialism, although politically oppressive and, in the long-term perspective, economically untenable, functioned for several decades. This would not have been possible without at least some degree of social legitimacy and some accommodation between the regime and society. The legitimacy was attained by trading political democracy for an egalitarian social welfare system and by the regime’s tacitly tolerating the existence of a “second society” [Hankis 1988]. Numerous social groups and strata profited from such conditions and were, for quite a long time, interested in maintaining them. Not surprisingly, some of them may still be regretting the loss of former privileges and advantages after 1989. In the Czech Republic this applies, for example, to the rural and semi-rural population with combined sources of income from agriculture and industry and which had profited from the highly subsidised, socialised form of agriculture as well as from the semi-formal supportive networks in rural communities. They enjoyed, during the forty years of Communist rule, an increase in their standard of living. Most advantages of this sort are now being lost, which creates disillusionment. A similar situation

⁶) In an entirely different setting (Italy), the transmission of political culture across large span of time was documented by R. D. Putnam [1993]. According to this author, persistence of patterns of civic engagement was rooted in the history of various regions.

applies to the population in those regions that were most subsidised in the past and which lost their preferential status after 1989. Similarly, in Slovakia, legitimacy of the system was supported by the rapid modernisation of Slovak society during the Communist rule, bolstered by the assistance, financial and other, obtained from the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia [c.f. Musil 1993, Szomolányi 1995].

When analysing the present transformation, one should, therefore, be aware that the experience with “really existing socialism” is not viewed as entirely negative by all groups within the populations of the Eastern and Central European countries. Moreover, the experience of that time established the high popular expectations toward the role which the state should play in providing and guaranteeing social welfare and social services. The society of “really existing socialism” is further idealised as the passage of time contributes to a selective memory forgetful of its hardships, and as the social costs of post-Communist transformation become heavier. From among those who lost after 1989, either in the objective sense or in their own minds only, whose expectations were not fulfilled, the discontented are recruited who may express their disappointment by the rejection of the reforms, by the pledge to choose the “third way” or by leftist or rightist extremism.

When compiling the balance sheet of the old system, not only its burdensome legacies should be considered but also the assets it might have left that could be used as resources in the transformation. It is debatable what exactly such assets are but universal literacy, general education and skilled labour force are certainly among them [c.f. Sztompka 1992].

Long-term strategic factors have become increasingly relevant in the post-Communist transformation

At least three historically different, yet overlapping sets of factors can be distinguished which are relevant in determining the transformation. The first set has to do with the more immediate circumstances of the *regime change* in the individual countries, among them the social and political parameters of the change itself. These include the structure, relative strength and composition of the institutional actors in the power struggle (for example, the consolidation of the anti-Communist opposition, its experience and determination, the morale of the Communist party etc.), the character of the coalitions they formed, the programs and strategies which they applied, the personalities of the political leaders, the immediate international situation, the mood of the masses etc. In their majority, such factors were situational, short-term and volatile, and frequently also decisional. They are related to the relatively narrow time span surrounding the collapse of the Communist regime, extending over several months, or perhaps a year or two. Some political scientists would attribute an important or even decisive role in shaping the transition to just this kind of factors, whose impact can be characterised as “*exit causality*”.⁷ While we agree that such circumstances were indeed highly relevant during that stage when power was being transferred, we would hypothesise that their relevance for further development has been decreasing during the later stages of transformation.

⁷) V. Dvořáková and J. Kunc in their excellent book on transitions to democracy present a systematic list of such approaches [cf. Dvořáková and Kunc 1994].

The second set of factors are the structural and cultural *legacies of the system of “really existing socialism”*, i.e. the more recent elements of continuity mentioned above. Their influence will also gradually weaken, but we believe that these factors will leave a lasting imprint on the shape of the post-Communist societies.

The third set of factors – one, the importance of which we wish to highlight here – are the long-term “strategic” characteristics of the countries and societies involved which result from their history and are also determined by their geopolitical position. Although socially produced, their pace of change is only slow. Such characteristics define the relevant environment not only of the post-Communist transformation, but they also influenced the ways in which the Communist regimes were assimilated in these countries.

What we have in mind here are, for example, the following strategic characteristics: the geopolitical situation of the countries involved – their size, geographic location, strategic importance, proximity to the developed world etc.; the economic resources of the countries – their natural resources, human resources, infrastructure, level and kind of industrialisation, structure of the economy etc.; the level and kind of modernisation; their political and social history – previous experience with a democratic political system, with independence, with the role of being either subjugated or dominant countries, the history of their social structure etc.; their cultural tradition – e.g. the technological, industrial, political cultures, the prevailing traditional value orientations as either individualistic or paternalistic, meritocratic or egalitarian, religious or secular, achievement oriented or complacent etc. Such strategic characteristics do influence the ways in which the individual societies of Eastern and Central Europe manage the post-1989 transformation and how they cope with the social and political tensions and conflicts associated with it. They influence the behaviour of the elites, the level of social integration, the political culture etc. Perhaps the term “*historical causality*” can therefore be used in this context to characterise their impact.

Probably one of the most important strategic characteristics of the Eastern and Central European societies is the *mutual timing* of two processes: of their modernisation⁸ and of the beginning of the Communist rule. On the one hand, there are countries which did not experience any major wave of modernisation prior to the Communist takeover or whose modernisation was not finished until that time. Another group are countries which had already been modernised (i.e., in particular, industrialised and urbanised) before the Communist seized power. Modernisation of the former was accomplished or completed by the Communist regimes as a component part of “building socialism”. No matter how problematic, the “really existing socialism” played a modernising role in these countries and the benefits of modernity are associated here with the era of the Communist rule, contributing to its legitimacy in the eyes of the population. In the latter group of countries, where the major part of modernisation had occurred independently of the Communist regime, the era of “really existing socialism” can be considered more as damaging the modernisation already attained and interrupting its further progress.⁹ As a result, other

⁸) By modernisation we understand here the complex process of societal change driven by industrialisation, technological progress, urbanisation, secularisation, political participation and the massive increase of literacy. C.f. Bendix [1969] or Smelser [1966].

⁹) The difference in the mutual timing of modernisation and the beginning of the Communist rule was used to explain the post-1989 tensions between the Slovak and the Czech parts of Czechoslovakia that lead eventually to the split of this country. Slovakia belonged to the group of countries

things equal, the exit from Communism should be easier in these countries. The market economy is probably easier to introduce in a society with a history of urban capitalism than in a former agricultural society urbanised and industrialised only during the years of the Communist regime. Also, it is one thing to build democratic political institutions in a society which had already some experience with democracy before the Communists seized power, and another one to do that in a country where the only pre-Communist political experience was a semi-feudal system or an authoritarian regime.

The post-Communist transformations can hardly be understood without considering these strategic factors. The recent developments should be analysed in a much broader time perspective than the post-1989 period alone or the four decades of the Communist regime, and within a much wider sociocultural space than the individual societies. The proper time-scale is the *whole modern history* of Eastern and Central Europe, within which the Communist era was a relatively short, although highly relevant episode. The appropriate sociocultural scale could be that of *civilisational orbits* determined by shared cultural and political experience (e.g. by common religion or by a long former ap-purtenance to supranational political units as was the case for the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman or the Russian empires). The strategic factors of transformation, being socially produced, are, of course, subject to change such that the burdens of history and geography are no irreversible fatalities. Yet, they change sufficiently slowly to be considered the givens in the context of the so far short period of post-Communist transformation.

We propose the hypothesis that, with the passage of time since the break-down of the Communist regime, the relevance of the strategic factors (of the “historical causality”) in determining the societal development of the post-Communist countries emerges more clearly, while that of the Communist legacies and of the “situational” factors relevant during the regime change (the “exit causality”) decreases. However, the influence of the legacies will probably fade away much more slowly than that of the “situational” factors. In other words, it is less important how the revolutions were performed whereas it is increasingly more important to take into account what resources (economic, social and cultural) transforming societies can mobilise.

Individual countries and their clusters, not Eastern and Central Europe as the whole, form the proper framework of analysis of transformation and of prediction of its further course

Much of transitological research has generalised on the transformations in Eastern and Central Europe as one whole, including e.g. the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic states, the Balkan states and the countries of the Visegrad group. The generalising approach has been based on the implicit assumptions that (1) these countries share certain geopolitically determined historical and cultural characteristics that make them all “Eastern European” or “Eastern and Central European”, (2) there are structural and cultural similarities among all these countries given by their common Communist past (the “legacies”) which are very important in the analysis and prediction of their post-Communist development, (3) that all the countries aim at the same target, i.e. political

where modernisation and the rule of Communism overlapped, while the Czech Republic was modernised already some fifty years earlier. In Slovakia, the Communist era was associated with progress, whereas in the Czech Republic it meant stagnation. C.f. Musil [1993] or Szomolányi [1995].

democracy and a market economy, (4) that on their way toward that target they will follow more or less the same path.

Such assumptions are justified only to some degree – and so are the generalisations which are based on them. The generalising approach may have been more legitimate before 1989, when the otherwise widely different societies of Eastern and Central Europe were amalgamated by the external pressure of the Soviet dominance and forced into the Procrustean bed of the uniform institutional structure (yet even then, there were many divergences), but has become less and less adequate since the Soviet grip was released in 1989. As suggested, “historical causality” is reasserting itself in the post-Communist development and, with it, all the long-term differences among the Eastern and Central European countries and their clusters that were forcefully overshadowed by the uniform institutions of the Communist system. The “*historical episode*” during which societies with considerably different historical backgrounds and systems of social organisation and belonging to different sociocultural orbits were assembled under one roof is over, and these societies are again embedded within their traditional contexts. Thus it is probably more legitimate to generalise on the transformations in clusters of kindred Eastern and Central European countries (the Visegrád four may be one of them), than on the post-Communist Europe as a whole. In fact, the concepts “Eastern and Central Europe” or the “post-Communist countries” are increasingly misleading as tools of analysis and prediction.

Conclusion

The above propositions have not touched upon all the important characteristics of the post-Communist transformation in Eastern and Central Europe – certainly many more could be mentioned (and, indeed, are mentioned in the literature). The propositions were meant to highlight some of those features of the transformation that, we believe, were not so clearly visible in the early phases of the process and have been emerging only in its later stages. Awareness of the complexity and social risks of the transformation, of the bonds linking it with the recent as well as the more distant history of the transforming countries (the logic of which cannot be easily escaped), awareness of the contradictory perceptions and evaluation of the Communist experience by different social groups, of the open-endedness of transformation as well as of its uneven and unequal course in the different countries, of the importance of the strategic characteristics of the Eastern and Central European societies for the process of transformation, should all contribute to a more balanced and realistic analysis and evaluation of what is happening in Eastern and Central Europe.

Of course, much of what we have proposed is tentative and must be further documented and verified. Moreover, we agree with Z. Bauman [1994] that it is still too early to make any definitive conclusions as the societal changes induced by the fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe are still going on and their destination and direction are uncertain. Anyhow, it can be expected that new phenomena will occur that will challenge the existing theories of transformation.

MICHAL ILLNER, since 1993 the director of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Lectures sociology of settlements at Charles University in Prague. His research interests have included urban and regional problems and policies, social issues of the local and regional development, the analysis of local politics, social change and social indicators. Re-

cently he co-edited (with H. Baldersheim and others) the book *Local Democracy and the Processes of Transformation in East-Central Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) and a EU sponsored report *Czech Republic – Transformations After 1989 and Beyond* (Inst. of Sociology: Prague 1993).

References

- Andorka, R. 1992. "Ursachen, Probleme und Loesungsstrategien in der Revolution in Ungarn." In *Lebensverhaeltnisse und soziale Konflikte im neuen Europa*. Verhandlungen des 26. Deutschen Soziologentages, ed. by B. Schaefers. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Ash, T. G. 1990. *We the People. The Revolution of 1989*. London: Granta/Penguin.
- Bauman, Z. 1994. "A Revolution in the Theory of Revolutions?" *International Social Science Review* 15: 15-24.
- Bendix, R. 1969. *Nation-building and citizenship*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Dahrendorf, R. 1990: *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*. London: Chatto Windus.
- Dvořáková, V., J. Kunc 1994. *O přechodech k demokracii* [On Transitions to Democracy]. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství.
- Gozelak, G., B. Jalowiecki, A. Kuklinski, L. Zienkowski (eds.) 1994. *Eastern and Central Europe 2000. Final Report*. Brussels: The European Commission.
- Habermas, J. 1990. *Die nachholende Revolution*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hankis, E. 1988. "'The Second Society'? Is There an Alternative Social Model Emerging in Contemporary Hungary?" *Social Research* 55: 13-42.
- Havel, V. 1990. "Moc bezmocných" [Power of the Powerless]. Pp. 55-133 in *O lidskou identitu* by V. Havel. Praha: Rozmluvy.
- Illner, M. 1992. "Continuity and Discontinuity. Political Change in Czech Village after 1989." *Czechoslovak Sociological Review*, Special Issue: 79-91.
- Illner, M. (ed.) 1993. *Czech Republic – Transformations After 1989 and Beyond. Scenario of Change Until the Year 2005. National Report*. Prague: The Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.
- Jehlička, J., T. Kostecký, L. Sýkora 1993. "Czechoslovak parliamentary elections in 1990: old patterns, new trends and lots of surprises." Pp. 235-254 in *The New Political Geography of Easternern Europe*, ed. by J. O'Loughlin and H. van der Wusten. London: Belhaven Press.
- Juchler, J. 1994. *Osteuropa im Umbruch*. Zurich: Seismo Verlag.
- Kostecký, T. 1994: "Economic, Social and Historical Determinants of Voting Patterns." *Czech Sociological Review* 2: 209-228.
- Machonin, P. 1992. "Changes in Central and Eastern Europe: Political and Economic Transition or Social Transformation?" *Sisyphus* 8, No. 2: 129-133.
- Machonin, P. 1994. "Social and Political Transformation in the Czech Republic." *Czech Sociological Review* 2: 71-87.
- Matějů, P. 1995. "In Search of Explanations for Recent Left-Turns in Post-Communist Countries." *Working Papers* WP 95/1. Praha: Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Chapter prepared for *Stability and Change in Post-Communist Europe: Winners and Losers of the Transformation*, ed. by D. J. Treiman, P. Matějů and I. Szelenyi, forthcoming).
- Možný, I. 1991. *Proč tak snadno?* [Why so easy?]. Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství.
- Musil, J. 1992. "The Exit from Communism." *Daedalus* 121: 175-195.
- Musil, J. 1993. "Česká a slovenská společnost. Skica srovnávací studie" [The Czech and Slovak Societies. Attempt at a Comparative Study]. *Sociologický časopis* 29: 9-24.

- Offe, C. 1991. "Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in Eastern Central Europe", *Social Research* 58: 866-892.
- Przeworski, A. 1991. *Democracy and the Market. Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rychard, A. 1993. *Reforms, Adaptation, and Breakthrough. The Sources of and Limits to Institutional Changes in Poland*. Warsaw: IFiS Publishers.
- Smelser, N. 1966. "The modernization of social relations." In *Modernization*, ed. by M. Weiner. New York: Basic Books.
- Srubar, I. 1994. "Variants of the Transformation Process in Central Europe. A Comparative Assessment." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 23: 198-221.
- Staniszki, J. 1991. *The Dynamics of Breakthrough in Eastern Europe – the Polish Experience*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Stark, D. 1992. "Path Dependency and Privatization Strategies in Eastern-Central Europe". *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 6: 17-51.
- Surázka, W. 1996. "Theoretical perspectives on Central Europe." *Czech Sociological Review* 4: 3-17.
- Szomolányi, S. 1995. "Prečo tak ťažko... sa konsoliduje demokracia na Slovensku?" [Why it is so difficult to consolidate democracy in Slovakia?]. *Literárni noviny/Prítomnosť*, No. 44 (November 2, 1995), p. 3.
- Sztompka, P. 1992. "Dilemmas of the Great Transition", *Sisyphus* 8, No. 2, 9-28.
- Sztompka, P. 1993. "Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 22: 85-95.
- Sztompka, P. 1996. "Pohled zpět: Rok 1989 jako kulturní a civilizační zlom" [Looking Back: The Year 1989 As a Cultural And Civilizational Break]. *Sociologický časopis* 32: 5-20.
- Wolchik, S. L. 1991. *Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics and Society*. London: Pinter Publishers.
- Zapf, W. 1991. "Der Untergang der DDR und die soziologische Theorie der Modernisierung." In *Experiment Vereinigung*, hrsg. von B. Giesen und C. Leggewie. Berlin.
- Zapf, W. 1994. *Modernisierung, Wohlfahrtsentwicklung und Transformation: Soziologische Aufsätze 1987 bis 1994*. Berlin: Sigma.
- Zon, H. van 1994. Problems of Transitology – Towards a New Research Agenda and New Research Practice. Report written for the project Eastern-Central Europe 2000.